

2010 Center of Population Moves West and South to Plato, Mo.

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Imagine if you could balance on your finger an imaginary, flat and weightless map of the 50 states and the District of Columbia with each resident placed where they reside and all weighing the same. The balance point would be the mean center of population.

In 1790, the first such center was near Chestertown in Kent County, Md., across the Chesapeake Bay from Baltimore.

Now, 22 censuses later, the center has migrated 873 miles west and a little south to rest near the village of Plato, population 109, in Texas County, Mo.

The center may never make it all the way to the state of Texas, but it has been headed that direction for decades. With each decade, the center shifts west and slightly north or south. The shift from 2000 to 2010 was comparatively short – only 23 miles – but it was the most southerly ever – bearing 238 degrees (270 degrees is due west).

The 2010 center of population was announced on March 24 by Director Bob Groves at the National Press Club in Washington. He explained how the center has moved over the decades.

“The distance between the centers, decade by decade, varies depending on how the population changed,” Groves said. “These reflect the addition of territories ... but also, the movement of people.”

The longest shift was 80 miles during the 1850s. The shortest shift was 10 miles during the 1910s.



Michael Ratcliffe points to the rocks that mark the exact location of the 2010 Census center of population with Darrell Pratte (Missouri state surveyor), Dave Doyle (National Geodetic Survey) and Rick Reese (Missouri Natural Resources). They are near the village of Plato in Missouri.



Dave Doyle of the National Geodetic Survey and the Census Bureau’s Michael Ratcliffe inspect the block of Missouri red granite that will become the base for the 2010 Census mark.



The 2010 Census mark is a stainless steel disc that is 12 inches in diameter, 1-inch thick and weighs 25.5 pounds.

“It’s a good reminder that the center can also be affected by eastward pulls,” Groves said. “That was the decade that saw large increases of immigrant populations going into the Northeast and the Midwest.”

Census geographer Michael Ratcliffe said the westerly shift was largely due to increased populations in Oregon, Utah, New Mexico, and especially California.

“Migration along the Oregon trail, Mormon migrants to Utah and the California Gold Rush – all of these demographic events began in the 1840s and continued into the 1850s, helping to pull the center of population farther westward than in previous decades,” Ratcliffe said. “The most northerly shift occurred with the aftermath of the Civil War. Cities in the Northeast and Midwest experienced substantial

population increases – New York was nearing 1 million residents, and Chicago grew by 166 percent. The Great Lakes states grew in population and settlement was beginning to increase in the Great Plains – Kansas tripled its population between 1860 and 1870.”

Despite six decades of northerly shift from 1830 to 1920, there have been 16 decades of southerly shift, including all nine decades from 1920 to 2010. Air conditioning has certainly made the south more livable. And while the trend is southerly, the distance of shift is getting



A team led by Indiana University professor Wilbur Cogswell (left), locates the center of population from 1910 Census data in Bloomington, Ind.

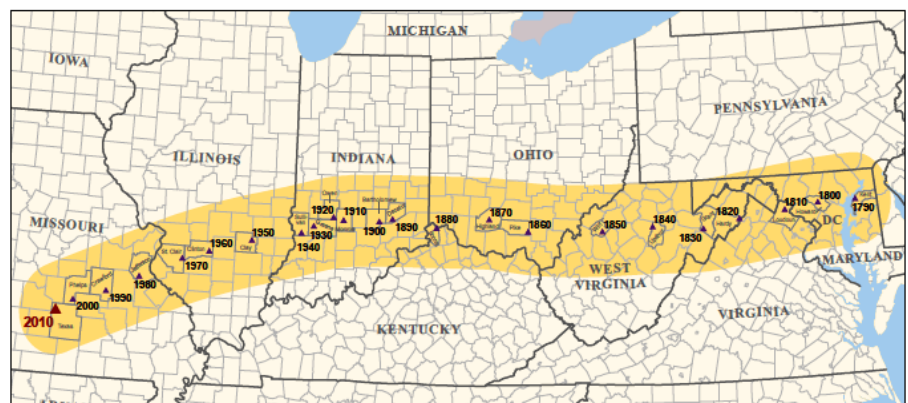


Edgar Springs, Mo., was the center of population in 2000.

Mean Center of Population 1790-2010

1790 Kent County, Md.
1800 Howard County, Md.
1810 Loudoun County, Va.
1820 Hardy County, W.Va.
1830 Grant County, W.Va.
1840 Upshur County, W.Va.
1850 Wirt County, W.Va.
1860 Pike County, Ohio
1870 Highland County, Ohio
1880 Boone County, Ky.
1890 Decatur County, Ind.
1900 Bartholomew County, Ind.
1910 Monroe County, Ind.
1920 Owen County, Ind.
1930 Greene County, Ind.
1940 Sullivan County, Ind.
1950 Clay County, Ill.
1960 Clinton County, Ill.
1970 St. Clair County, Ill.
1980 Jefferson County, Mo.
1990 Crawford County, Mo.
2000 Phelps County, Mo.
2010 Texas County, Mo.

Mean Center of Population for the United States: 1790 to 2010



Despite six decades of northerly shift from 1830 to 1920, there have been 16 decades of southerly shift, including all nine decades from 1920 to 2010. Air conditioning has certainly made the south more livable. And while the trend is southerly, the distance of shift is getting

shorter. During the first 10 decades, the average shift was more than 50 miles per decade. Since 1890, the distance has shortened to less than 31 miles per decade.

After every decennial, the Census Bureau has calculated the mean center of population and issued the exact coordinates in latitude and longitude. The earliest known survey marker – or mark – to be placed on the earth at or near a U.S. center of population was for the 1910 Census. The mark is on the courthouse lawn in Bloomington, Ind.

Since 1960, the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has “monumented” the centers with marks. NGS Project Manager Dave Doyle was involved in setting and positioning the 1980, 1990 and 2000 marks. He is leading the effort to mark the 2010 center.

“This will be the first mark to be set in stone, a beautiful block of Missouri red granite,” Doyle said. “We hope everyone will visit these marks. They’re fun to find, and each one tells a unique story about our nation’s history.”